



Environment, Sustainability and Biodiversity Report 2020-21

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Who we are

1. About us

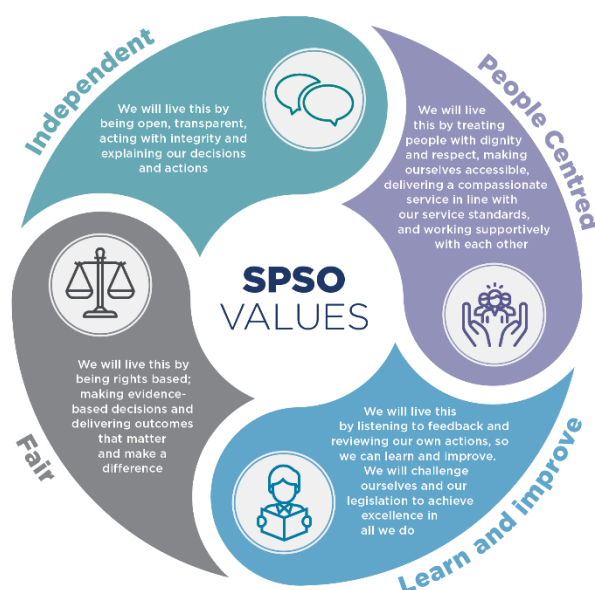
1.1. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) has a wide remit, covering a variety of functions and services. The Ombudsman's powers and duties come (predominantly) from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002, which gives her four distinct statutory functions:

- the final stage for complaints about most devolved public services in Scotland including councils, the health service, prisons, water and sewerage providers, Scottish Government, universities and colleges.
- specific powers and responsibilities to publish complaints handling procedures, and to monitor and support best practice in complaints handling.
- independent review service for the Scottish Welfare Fund with the power to overturn and substitute decisions made by councils on Community Care and Crisis Grant applications.
- the role of Independent National Whistleblowing Officer (INWO) for the NHS in Scotland, the final stage for complaints about how the NHS considers whistleblowing disclosures and the treatment of individuals concerned.

1.2. All of the SPSO's services are free and independent.

2. Values

2.1. We are committed to living our values to deliver our functions efficiently, effectively and economically. While our remit is wide, and expanding, we aspire to deliver our business coherently and consistently across all functions. We strive to continue to give great service to all who come to us; whether to make a complaint about a public body, seek our advice and support, ask for a review of a Scottish Welfare Fund decision or complain about how the NHS has handled a whistleblowing concern.



3. Vision

- 3.1. We contribute actively and positively to high performing Scottish public services. Recognised for our innovative world-leading approach, we put people and learning at the heart of all we do.
- 3.2. We will live our values through four strategic themes that drive our activity and annual business plans.

- Accessibility
- Access to justice
- Capacity
- Standards

Summary

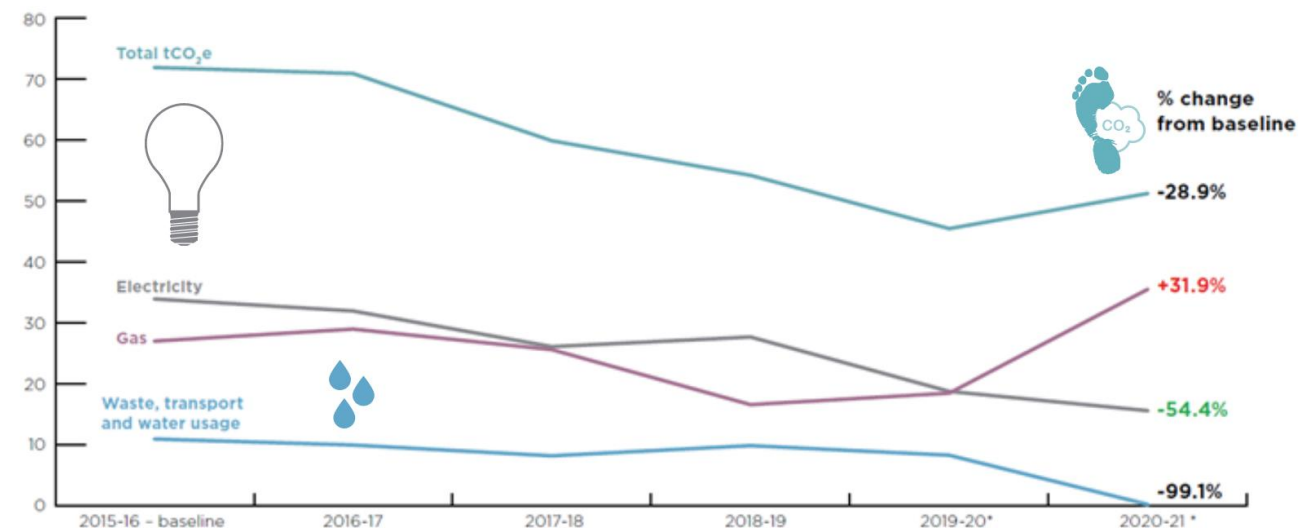
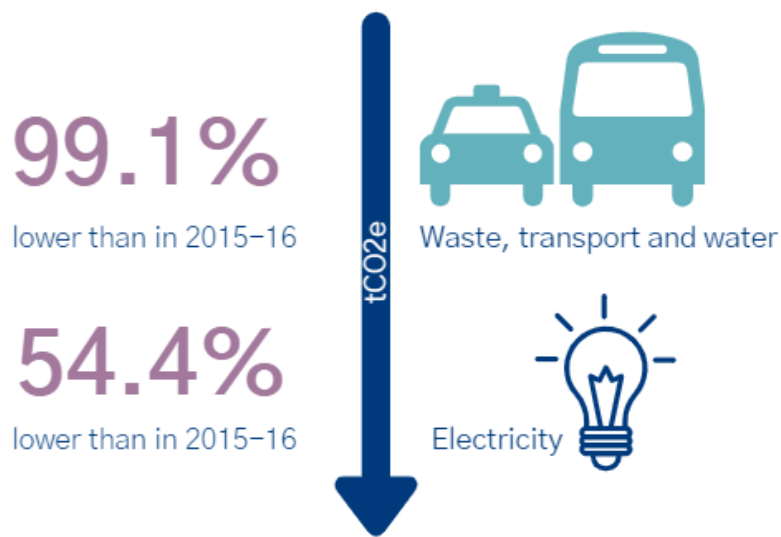
- 3.3. Scotland has ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and, along with other public-sector bodies, SPSO recognises its role in taking forward this agenda. In May 2019, the Scottish Government declared a climate emergency and in June 2019, the First Minister launched 'The Big Climate Conversation'. This conversation will look at how Scotland becomes a net-zero emissions nation.
- 3.4. Most of the SPSO's resources are dedicated to delivering its statutory functions. However, the SPSO can make a direct contribution to sustainability by ensuring that it implements policies and procedures that continue to reduce its carbon footprint.
- 3.5. Critical to measuring progress against Scotland's action plan to reduce emissions and progress climate action, the Climate Change (Duties of Public Bodies: Reporting Requirements) (Scotland) Order 2015 requires an annual report to be submitted using the Scottish Government's online system. The SPSO has been voluntarily publishing these figures on an annual basis since 2011-12.
- 3.6. Additionally, the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 places a statutory duty on all public bodies in Scotland to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 introduced a further statutory requirement for public bodies in Scotland to provide a publicly available report every three years, on the actions which they have taken to meet this biodiversity duty.
- 3.7. This report is our response to these duties.

4. Performance in carbon emissions

- 4.1. The SPSO became the leaseholder for Bridgeside House in August 2018 on behalf of all three office-holders – Children and Young Person's Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS), the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC) and the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). In 2022, Bridgeside House will also accommodate the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner (SBC). The carbon emission figures contained in this report include the waste and utility figures for all office-holders accommodated in Bridgeside House, and transport figures for SPSO only.
- 4.2. **Since March 2020, the majority of SPSO employees have been working from home due to the Scottish Government lockdown responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.** There were a minimum number of key workers in Bridgeside House to complete essential work for colleagues that could not be completed from home. This has led to a significant reduction in electricity use, transport use and waste emissions for this period in Bridgeside House. The SPSO has not calculated

emissions from home-working, but will include the Carbon Trust's home-working estimate in the 2020-21 SPSO Climate Change Report.

- 4.3. In 2020-21, we reduced our office emissions by 20.8 tCO₂e from the 2015-16 baseline figure. However, this was an increase in tonnes of CO₂ emitted since the previous reporting year (2019-20) due to gaining access to accurate meter readings for gas usage and the inclusion of gas emissions from communal areas of Bridgeside House in SPSO reporting. The SPSO has put in place actions which is hoped to reduce its gas emissions over the next year.
- 4.4. We have reduced our office carbon footprint by twenty-eight percent against our 2015-16 baseline, and by forty percent since 2009-10 (85.3 tCO₂e).



* SPSO plus CYPSCS and SHRC (shared accommodation in Bridgeside House)

- 4.5. Further details of these reductions are in our [sustainability reports on our website](#).

5. Environmental and sustainable development

Facilities

- 5.1. The move to Bridgeside House in December 2018 was a leap forward in assisting SPSO to manage its carbon emissions, whilst also progressing the shared-services agenda with other office-holders. The new facilities have enabled us to continue to reduce the total emissions for all three organisations, even when compared with SPSO sole output in previous years. These equate to less than 0.004 tCO₂e per square metre (m²) floor space we occupy.
- 5.2. The building has an Energy Performance Indicator (EPC) of C+, with full wall double glazing for natural light, windows with trickle vents to allow temperature control, motion-sensor lighting to reduce electricity use and lower ceilings to allow better conservation of energy.
- 5.3. The air-conditioning provided throughout the building is tempered fresh-air mechanical ventilation, for energy efficiency and good health, and the temperature is regulated using thermostats timed to operate only during office hours. Air-cooling facilities are only installed in the large, shared meeting spaces, to complement the mechanical ventilation when the room is used at full capacity.
- 5.4. Decisions were taken during the design and fit out of the office to reduce the environmental impact of the office use. These included the installation of zip heater water boilers in tea points, combi-ovens and induction hob in shared kitchen, no use of chrome in any fittings, and a 'follow me' document printer system requiring an ID card to print documents, significantly reducing our volume of paper waste.
- 5.5. Each tea point and printer station has recycling facilities, and as part of the Health and Safety induction, new staff are advised of SPSO's recycling procedures and commitment to reducing carbon emissions/waste. All of the SPSO's general waste is recycled, alongside items such as toner cartridges, batteries, pallets and electrical appliances such as heaters. As part of Display Screen Equipment (DSE) training, staff are also advised, if possible, to use the stairs in the office for their own health and well-being, while also reducing energy use.
- 5.6. In 2020-21, the SPSO undertook a project to further reduce the emissions from lighting, by replacing all existing lighting with LED bulbs in banks, reducing the use of lights in areas where staff aren't working. We also installed occupancy sensors in all small rooms to ensure lighting is only on while needed.



Transport and travel

- 5.7. Our Travel and Expenses Policy encourages staff to travel on public transport wherever possible for work related business. During the fit out of Bridgeside House we replaced two car parking spaces with bicycle storage for up to twenty-two bikes, and a purpose built shower block to support sustainable transport options for staff.

- 5.8. In 2020-21, following suggestions from cyclists, we took the opportunity to make improvements to the Bridgeside House shower block to further encourage staff to travel to work sustainably on our return to the office. This included installing a hair dryer, mirror and clothing hooks. In order to encourage bike travel, the SPSO also offer a bicycle and safety equipment loan, which has been met with great interest and moderate take-up.
- 5.9. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown there has been no business travel, but these circumstances have greatly promoted the adoption and use of video conferencing for all meetings and conferences. This is a positive change of behaviour that will be conducive to reducing business travel in the future. To further support this, SPSO has also installed video conferencing facilities in Bridgeside House meeting rooms to allow staff and external stakeholders to access Bridgeside House meetings remotely, further reducing indirect travel emissions.

6. Biodiversity

6.1. The Ombudsman is committed to supporting the Scottish Government's policies on environmental and sustainable development and understands her obligation to publish a biodiversity report. The SPSO does not own or manage land and, therefore, we have limited opportunity to carry out activities for biodiversity. The main functions of the SPSO are carried out from a single location in central Edinburgh.

6.2. We support biodiversity through:

- reducing our carbon footprint;
- encouraging staff to reduce their personal carbon footprints by sharing a carbon footprint calculator;
- running Resource Efficient Scotland's Climate Change Assessment Tool to assess our response to climate change duties and identify areas for improvement;
- minimising waste and reducing waste to landfill through recycling;
- using products made from recycled material including office supplies such as Ecolabel certified paper and pens;
- providing filtered mains tap water to reduce plastic bottle use;
- using fully biodegradable and fragrance-free cleaning products in Bridgeside House;
- using local and environmentally-minded suppliers wherever possible;
- installing video conferencing facilities in meeting rooms to encourage staff/stakeholders to attend meetings remotely;
- supporting 'paper lite' meetings and introducing an electronic file-sharing platform to reduce our reliance on paper;
- raising awareness of biodiversity and sustainability issues through our climate change working group;



- supplying recycling outlets throughout the office;
- implementing a 'wash it and squash it' campaign to reduce waste volume; and
- reminder labels to 'switch it off' at light switches and monitors.

7. Climate change group

- 7.1. A climate change working group was introduced during 2016-17, made up of staff representatives across the organisation. The group aims to share best practice, think creatively about sustainability opportunities and lead on new green initiatives.
- 7.2. Notably, with encouragement from colleagues in the climate change working group, staff make a variety of annual pledges each Climate Week. Pledges focus on changing behaviour, and include individual commitments to cut down on food packaging, take food waste home to compost and to upgrade all lightbulbs at home to energy saving versions.
- 7.3. The climate change group have also led recycling awareness sessions in their teams to encourage staff to recycle correctly and have visited our provider's local recycling centre to see what happens to our waste when it is recycled.
- 7.4. In 2020-21, the climate change group took part in running Resource Efficient Scotland's Climate Change Assessment Tool (CCAT) alongside volunteers from all teams within the SPSO. This allowed the group to identify areas for improvement in the SPSO's climate change response and generated a list of actions for 2021-22 to help us to meet our net zero target of 2030.

8. Working in partnership and communications

- 8.1. The SPSO's stationery and paper shredding suppliers are accredited to the ISO14001 international standard for environmental management systems. The paper we use in the office is recycled and sourced from a local supplier. We also work with Changeworks Recycling who have won awards for environmental best practice. 100% of the SPSO's shredded paper is delivered to paper mills in Scotland where it is recycled into low-grade tissue products.
- 8.2. The Ombudsman publishes a Climate Change Duties Report on an annual basis that provides specific detail on her office's wider environmental sustainability efforts. These can be found on the [SPSO's sustainability reports webpage](#).

9. Looking ahead

- 9.1. So far the SPSO have significantly reduced our carbon emissions by 20.8 tCO₂e since 2015-16, mostly through adaptations to the physical office environment. We will continue to identify ways to further reduce our carbon emissions through the implementation of actions generated from the CCAT and the promotion of environmentally friendly behaviours.

Monitoring

- 9.2. In 2021-22, the SPSO are taking part in a voluntary energy benchmarking initiative led by the Scottish Government, the Scottish Energy Officer Network (SEON), the

Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN) and Zero Waste Scotland (ZWS). This will help us to assess our building emissions against other public sector buildings of a similar size, age and function and ensure the SPSO is contributing to the wider Scottish public sector's efforts to combat climate change.

Policy and strategy development

- 9.3. The SPSO will also work to further develop our climate change working group and network of green champions. The climate change working group intend to draft a climate change strategy incorporating actions resulting from the CCAT over the coming year. The strategy will provide carbon emission targets, cover actions to improve biodiversity, and promote sustainable working practices. The group will also be taking forward actions to ensure all SPSO projects are assessed for their impact on the environment, carbon management responsibilities are included in staff job descriptions and will add a climate change risk to the SPSO's corporate risk register.

Working practices

- 9.4. As mentioned earlier, from April 2020 it has been necessary for the majority of SPSO staff to work from home. In addition to attending all meetings and conferences by video conference, it also created an urgent need for paper documents received by the office to be scanned and shared with staff electronically wherever possible. This has led to 'paper-lite' working for the majority of staff, and moving most of our casework to electronic files only. We will also be implementing PDF editing software into our casework management system to improve 'paper-lite' working for casework staff in 2021.
- 9.5. In August 2020, the SPSO moved to a secure, electronic file-sharing platform for sharing casework documents to reduce printing and our reliance on couriering casefiles, thereby reducing indirect travel emissions, electricity emissions and paper waste. This software will be integrated with our casework management system in the next year to enhance its usability for case workers.
- 9.6. Additionally, all staff have been provided with laptops, which collectively use less energy than traditional desktop computers. Looking past the pandemic, the SPSO has convened an internal future working group to look at how changes to working practices may continue in an adapted form, as we review the learnings and outcomes from this new way of working.



Behaviours

- 9.7. As the new working practices are expected to result in significantly more working from home for all staff, the climate change working group will also focus on raising awareness amongst staff to further reduce emissions and work towards decreasing their personal carbon footprints, by reducing energy use and making

environmentally conscious decisions at home. For example, this may include encouraging staff to consider switching to renewable green energy tariffs, switching off unused electrical items, reducing food waste, or reducing thermostat temperatures.

- 9.8. Going forward, the SPSO will aim to continue reducing emissions wherever possible and embed awareness of environmental issues and the need to mitigate climate change, and consider our wider social impact.